

# IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE

## Issues and Guidelines

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**IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE:**

**Issues and Guidelines**

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE: IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE: Issues and Guidelines

ABSTRACT: The President's Executive Order 12862 of September 11, 1993, sets a priority and provides direction for improving customer service in federal agencies. What is quality customer service? How can customer service be improved? What are some of the barriers to providing quality customer service? This paper uses the President's direction as a framework to discuss these basic issues and provide recommendations for improving customer service within the USDA Forest Service.

KEYWORDS: barriers, customer service, reinvention, surveys

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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SUMMARY: To be effective, a Customer Service Plan must be developed by the employees and their customers, not by one individual. This document is therefore not a Customer Service Plan, but may instead provide the background material to aid in developing a Customer Service Plan within the USDA Forest Service, at the Forest or District level. The framework for this discussion is the President's Executive Order 12862: Setting Customer Service Standards. Basic issues in customer service are discussed in the form of problems, barriers, ideas, and recommendations.



Research methods used included contacting representatives from two successful organizations, WalMart and Motorola; interviewing Forest Service employees active in Total Quality Management and Reinventing Government; and researching literature on current management theory related to customer service.

As with most problems, there are short term solutions (easily implemented) and long term solutions (requiring major shifts in organizational philosophy) which are recommended. Quality customer service within the federal government requires both.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The President's Executive Order 12862 of September 11, 1993, sets a priority and provides direction for improving Customer Service in federal agencies. The purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding of what quality customer service is, what some of the barriers are, and to provide recommendations for improving customer service within the USDA Forest Service. The President's Executive Order is used as the framework for organizing this discussion.

Research methods used included contacting representatives from two successful organizations, WalMart and Motorola; interviewing Forest Service employees active in Total Quality Management and Reinventing Government; and researching literature on current management theory related to customer service.

### What is Customer Service?

A Customer is "A person who buys goods or services, especially on a regular basis." (Morris, 1981) Service is defined as "Employment in duties or work for another; especially, such employment for a government." (Morris, 1981) A Customer is a person with a problem who comes to you for a solution, and Service is your response to that Customer.

Customers include both external clients and internal clients (employees). Employees in the process of getting their job done (which includes serving their customers) also need services provided. The quality of service they receive is directly related to the quality of service they can give. This is a key issue in the federal government where the basic organizational structure often limits the ability of the employee to respond to the customer.

"Our research [The Forum Corporation] shows that you can't really gain lasting competitive advantage unless you work at both product quality and service quality,..." (Whiteley, 1991, page 4) Therefore, a discussion on service must also include some mention of quality. Components of quality often include some reference to function, timeliness, and appearance, and are directly correlated with the expectations of the Customer.

#### Why is Customer Service important?

Charles Garfield in his book, Second to None, states that "In the 1990s, the quality of an organization's service will be a primary determinant of its success or failure." (Garfield, 1992, page 194) Poor service is the number one reason customers take their business elsewhere. This theme is repeated in numerous other books on Customer Service.

Staying in business is essential to survival in the private sector, but what about the public sector? Some of the benefits of providing quality customer service in the public sector are:

- \* Quality customer service builds support for programming and funding.
- \* Satisfied external customers increases the level of satisfaction among employees which lowers turnover and increases morale.
- \* Employees must work together to provide quality customer service, which increases internal harmony and leads to higher productivity. (Kaset International, 11/92, pages 7-8)

## II. DISCUSSION

This section is a discussion of basic concepts and research organized under each directive of the President's Executive Order 12862. (A copy of the President's Executive Order 12862 follows on page 4.)

The President's Executive Order 12862 applies to the federal agency level. In the case of the Forest Service, the federal agency is the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). A plan showing how the USDA will accomplish the President's Order was due March 8, 1994. The Forest Service input to this plan has two parts. Part I - Creating a customer-driven Forest Service, basically says that we will survey our customers, develop a set of standards, and (that top management will) emphasize the importance of customer service. Part II is not included. According to the Introduction, Part II is a plan for incorporating customer surveys into the reinvention process.



THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 11, 1993

EXECUTIVE ORDER 12862

SETTING CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

Putting people first means ensuring that the Federal Government provides the highest quality service possible to the American people. Public officials must embark upon a revolution within the Federal Government to change the way it does business. This will require continual reform of the executive branch's management practices and operations to provide service to the public that matches or exceeds the best service available in the private sector.

NOW, THEREFORE, to establish and implement customer service standards to guide the operations of the executive branch, and by the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, it is hereby ordered:

Section 1. Customer Service Standards. In order to carry out the principles of the National Performance Review, the Federal Government must be customer-driven. The standard of quality for services provided to the public shall be: Customer service equal to the best in business. For the purposes of this order, "customer" shall mean an individual or entity who is directly served by a department or agency. "Best in business" shall mean the highest quality of service delivered to customers by private organizations providing a comparable or analogous service.

All executive departments and agencies (hereinafter referred to collectively as "agency" or "agencies") that provide significant services directly to the public shall provide those services in a manner that seeks to meet the customer service standard established herein and shall take the following actions:

(a) identify the customers who are, or should be, served by the agency;

(b) survey customers to determine the kind and quality of services they want and their level of satisfaction with existing services;



- (c) post service standards and measure results against them;
- (d) benchmark customer service performance against the best in business;
- (e) survey front-line employees on barriers to, and ideas for, matching the best in business;
- (f) provide customers with choices in both the sources of service and the means of delivery;
- (g) make information, services, and complaint systems easily accessible; and
- (h) provide means to address customer complaints.

Sec. 2. Report on Customer Service Surveys. By March 8, 1994, each agency subject to this order shall report on its customer surveys to the President. As information about customer satisfaction becomes available, each agency shall use that information in judging the performance of agency management and in making resource allocations.

Sec. 3. Customer Service Plans. By September 8, 1994, each agency subject to this order shall publish a customer service plan that can be readily understood by its customers. The plan shall include customer service standards and describe future plans for customer surveys. It also shall identify the private and public sector standards that the agency used to benchmark its performance against the best in business. In connection with the plan, each agency is encouraged to provide training resources for programs needed by employees who directly serve customers and by managers making use of customer survey information to promote the principles and objectives contained herein.

Sec. 4. Independent Agencies. Independent agencies are requested to adhere to this order.

Sec. 5. Judicial Review. This order is for the internal management of the executive branch and does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable by a party against the United States, its agencies or instrumentalities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

THE WHITE HOUSE,  
September 11, 1993.

# # #

(a) identify the customers who are, or should be, served by the agency

David Osborne and Ted Gaebler in their book, Reinventing Government, maintain that "Most public organizations don't even know who their customers are..." (Osborne, 1992, pages 166-167)

Who are our customers in the Forest Service?

Anyone who stops by the office, calls on the phone, writes us a letter, talks to us in person, drives through the National Forest, bids on a timber sale, requests a special use permit, studies neo-tropical migrant birds...the list is endless. Each Forest has unique offerings and opportunities, meaning each Forest needs to decide who their major customers are.

Every citizen of the United States is a potential customer. Any person in the world who visits this country, is a potential customer. For most companies, the customer base is more limited. In his book, Customers for Life, Carl Sewell has selected a mission and an image that supports that mission for his car dealerships. That image is demonstrated through their product, their service, and their marketing. Customers can go elsewhere for the same or similar products, if they choose. Many customers of the Forest Service have no where else to go for the service they desire. In this situation, it becomes even more critical to try to meet the customer's needs.

To further complicate the issue, recently the concept of the public as owners, not just customers, has become accepted. As owners, their rights expand to include participation in how the National Forests are managed.

Has any National Forest identified their customers?

The Toiyabe National Forest in their Annual Quality Plan for 1994 (USDA Forest Service, 1994, page 8), has identified their customer base. They define and list Primary Customers, Primary Partners, and Primary Suppliers. Their definitions are:

A Customer is: "A person or organization using or benefiting from the National Forest, but who's [whose] activity is not necessarily contributing to a healthier ecosystem." This group includes recreation users, walk in traffic, special use permittees, employees, miners, news media, communities and schools, congressional staff, and local government.

A Partner is: "An external person or organization which we need to conduct our business. [They provide] A symbiotic or synergistic working relationship which promotes the stewardship ethic." This group includes: interpretive associations, media, other agencies and organizations, law enforcement and fire protection groups, rural development, recreation permittees, volunteers, ranchers and loggers, educators, tourism bureaus, and agencies which assist with land acquisition.

A Supplier is: "A person or organization who must do something for us in order for us to succeed in our business." This group includes: telecommunication permittees, media, the Regional Office, the Washington Office, support functions, Congress, resource specialists, research groups, management consultants, employee assistance program, vendors, employees, and miners.

(b) survey customers to determine the kind and quality of services they want and their level of satisfaction with existing services

Carl Sewell in his book Customers for Life, states: "We don't assume anything. Instead, we try to find out. If you give customers a chance to talk, and if you're willing to listen, they'll tell you exactly what's important to them." (Sewell, 1990, page 3)

How do we find out what Forest Service customers want?

There are many different ways to listen to your customers. The authors of Reinventing Government suggest a few here: customer surveys, customer follow-up [monitoring], community surveys, customer contact, customer councils, focus groups, customer interviews, electronic mail, customer service training, test marketing, quality guarantees, inspectors, ombudsmen, complaint tracking systems, 800 numbers, and suggestion boxes or forms. (Osborne, 1992, pages 177-179)

The Forest Service has just completed a nationwide telephone survey to determine public opinion on the management of the National Forests. For a summary of the results, see inset page 11, FOREST SERVICE VALUES POLL QUESTIONS: Results and Analysis.



How do we find out what Forest Service recreation customers want?

In Recreation, "...the USDA Forest Service has developed and implemented a survey research procedure for both population-level and site-level baselining and monitoring... Two survey technologies have been developed, tested and implemented for providing improved data and analytical capability about recreation demand and the quality of opportunities. The National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE), is an origin-based personal survey procedure to develop population-wide data about recreation demand and special issues... The Customer Use and Survey Techniques for Operations, Management, Evaluation and Research (CUSTOMER) [was] developed to provide the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management with data about those people who are currently engaging in outdoor recreation on the federal lands these agencies manage." (Both surveys have OMB approval.) (Cordell, 10/92, page 422)

The NSRE was administered in 1993. The results are expected in the fall of 1994. CUSTOMER has been administered on 19 Forests nationwide, at the request of those Forests. (CUSTOMER has not been used on the Wayne National Forest.)

CUSTOMER has three stages: full length, report card, and comment card.

Ideally, the first survey on your Forest would be the full length survey, administered in person, following strict sampling procedures (to produce statistically sound results). This establishes a baseline of recreation use for that Forest, which is tied to Meaningful Measures. (Meaningful Measures is a set of quality standards tied to research. See page 16.)

Follow up surveys could use CUSTOMER Report Card and CUSTOMER Comment Card. CUSTOMER Report Card also follows strict sampling procedures. This survey is designed to provide corrections to the original baseline data and to provide a format for periodic input from customers. CUSTOMER Comment Card has no set format. It is short and self administered which allows for feedback on one particular area or situation.

The three methods of administration are: personal interview, mail, or self administered on site. Personal interviews are preferred, but they are also the most time consuming and therefore the most expensive. They usually provide the best rate of return and allow for personal contact and clarification with the customer. Mail surveys allow for controlled sampling, but the rate of return is lower. Self administered on site gives management feedback, but since the sampling rate is unknown, the results are not statistically valid.

See inset page 12, CUSTOMER: Preliminary Results.

What other non-survey methods have been used in the Forest Service?

The Wayne National Forest used a public task force to develop a ten year plan for the trail system on the Forest. The Forest set the guidelines and the process, and the task force developed the plan.

Other Forests have used the Limits of Acceptable Change process to determine indicators for management action related to wilderness resources. This process actively involves the public in making these determinations.

It is likely that each Forest has examples of the solicitation and use of public (customer) input.



FOREST SERVICE VALUES POLL QUESTIONS: Results and Analysis, Kaset  
International, 5/94

The USDA Forest Service has just completed a nationwide telephone survey to assess how the public feels about their national Forests and to help set direction for the Forest Service of the future. 26 questions were asked of 500 randomly selected U.S. residents during the week of April 25, 1994. Each question was rated on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 was strongly disagree, 4 was neither agree nor disagree, and 7 was strongly agree.

Ten major issues related to the management of the National Forests were identified. The public would like the Forest Service to:

1. Maintain healthy public forests. "...the overriding concern of United States residents is maintaining healthy public forests and grasslands." (Kaset, 5/94, page 1)
2. Use a scientific approach to the management of public forests.
3. Create recreation opportunities on public lands.
4. Balance recreation use of public land with logging, mining, and grazing use.
5. Inform and interact with the public so they can take an active role in managing and protecting public forests.
6. Not compromise the long term health of the public forest land for short term gains.
7. Represent the public's interest in public land management.
8. Not satisfy the consumer needs of the public at the expense of the health of public forests.
9. Discover and disseminate new information for solving the natural resource problems of the future.
10. Assist state and local government agencies and private land owners in managing forest lands.

The report makes three general and three specific recommendations. The general recommendations are:

1. Make maintaining healthy public forests and grasslands the top priority of the Forest Service.
2. In planning for the future, balance constituency needs and objectives.
3. As the reinvention team plans the future, keep the information needs of the public in mind.

The specific recommendations are:

1. Conduct focus groups to find the reasons the public responded as they did.
2. Contrast and compare the values poll data with the qualitative data solicited from interested parties.
3. Consider conducting other polls and/or surveys.

CUSTOMER: Preliminary Results (1991-1993)

A sampling of Final Reports from CUSTOMER (full length) surveys completed in different regions, yielded the following generalizations.

The typical National Forest recreation user is: male; white; 25 to 44 years old; has some college education; is employed full time; is married with children; and has an income between \$25,000 and \$50,000.

The typical National Forest recreation user wants: clean facilities; safe recreation areas; high quality scenery; and reasonable fees. The satisfaction level is high for all elements except clean facilities. The public would like cleaner facilities.

The summary reports used to gather this information are from: the Chequamegon National Forest (R-9); the Wenatchee National Forest (Wenatchee District) (R-6); the Shasta-Trinity National Forest (R-5); the Coconino National Forest (R-3); the Gold Belt Tour (BLM - Colorado); the George Washington National Forest (R-8); and the Toiyabe National Forest (Las Vegas District) (R-4).

(c) post service standards and measure results against them

What are service standards and how are they measured?

Some examples of service standards are: every customer must be greeted within 15 seconds of entering the door, zero defects, the customer is always right, 100% guarantee of product, full refund - no questions asked, etc. These standards reflect the organization's view of their customers and their priority.

"Quality means transaction quality, not just product or service quality. Quality is a starting point not an ending point, with a focus on the presence of value and not the absence of defects." "...customers gravitate toward the supplier who exceeds their expectations." (Guaspari, 1988, page 148) Service standards need to apply to both products and services and be responsive to the customer's needs.

Standards are measured by actions and actions need to reinforce the organization's goals. Measuring customer service standards may be easy or it may be difficult. How many cars sold per month is easy. How many satisfied customers you have is harder to determine. Measurements need to be easy to make and important to measure. It is not useful to spend time measuring things which are not of value (that is, they are not related to the goal of improving customer service).

What service does the Forest Service provide?

Through mission and related statements, organizations clarify for themselves and their customers what their service goals are. Charles Garfield, in his book Second to None, also identifies this process as the first step in moving toward a customer oriented culture.



According to Peter Block, in his book Stewardship, "Ownership resides with those who craft and create a vision, and with them alone." (Block, 1993, page 191) The Forest Service mission and related statements were developed by management at the top, but are to be implemented by employees at the bottom. Will they be committed to implementing something they had no say in developing?

In 1989, the Forest Service identified their national Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles. The Mission is "to achieve quality land management under the sustainable multiple-use management concept to meet the diverse needs of people." Today we call this Ecosystem Management. See inset page 17 for the complete version of the USDA FOREST SERVICE: National Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles.

Region 9, under a special program called Project SPIRIT, developed their own Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles, which they called Philosophy, Vision, and Role. Since 1987, they have tried to translate these principles into actions. See inset page 18, REGION 9: Project SPIRIT.

Architecture for Change: Interim Report of the Forest Service Reinvention Team (6/15/94) discusses the six important concepts that will guide the future Forest Service. Five proposed models of the future Forest Service are also presented. These findings need to be considered along with the existing national Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles and the other information presented here, in determining what service the Forest Service is and should be providing to their customers. See inset page 20, ARCHITECTURE FOR CHANGE: Interim Report of the Forest Service Reinvention Team.

Region 4 uses the national Mission and Vision statements, and a simple Desired Future. (This information is from Strategic Framework - USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region - 10/14/93.)

The Desired Future for Region 4 is:

"We in the Intermountain Region are leaders in:

- \* progressive stewardship for the land and natural resources under our care and influence;
- \* exemplary public service for our customers;
- \* creating a quality environment for our employees."

Region 4 then defines the three desired future condition statements and adds principles to each for clarification. Notice that employees and customers are equal in importance to land stewardship.

#### What are the Forest Service standards and how do we measure results?

The Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles, the Reinvention Report, and each Region's interpretations of those items, provide the basis for developing Forest Service standards. Each Forest needs to develop specific standards and measurement criteria tailored to that Forest.

Measurement of results is easier to understand when an organization produces a specific product, such as a car or computer. Peter Block in Stewardship, advises focusing on outcomes rather than process and on long term quality, rather than short term quantity, when setting standards and measurements.

For example, customers could be routinely asked what their needs are and if they have been met. Customers could rate the Forest Service on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not satisfied, 3 is neutral, and 5 is very satisfied. A goal might be to have 90% of our customers in the 3 to 5 range. The process needed to reach satisfaction need not be specified.

In Recreation, the Forest Service has developed Meaningful Measures to increase customer satisfaction. Meaningful Measures are a set of quality standards tied to research. (The following information on Meaningful Measures is from a paper on the computer mail system. Date and author are unknown.)

"Research in quality assessment suggests that an effective monitoring program uses both external as well as internal measurement tools. That is, you need to provide opportunities for visitor appraisal of the service, and you must have a methodology in place that ensures a high probability of visitor satisfaction."

The process used to develop the Meaningful Measures standards could be applied to other functions; however, it does not address important components that are difficult to measure. The Meaningful Measures process involves these steps:

- \* Identify measurable components;
- \* Establish standards of quality or key measurements of those measurable components;
- \* Determine realistic costs;
- \* Set priorities for accomplishment of the goal;
- \* Allocate the program of work and agree to management attainment targets;
- \* Monitor, measure, and report attainment.



USDA FOREST SERVICE: National Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles (1989)

The Mission is:

"to achieve quality land management under the sustainable multiple-use management concept to meet the diverse needs of people."

The Vision is:

- \* "We are recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in caring for the land and serving people.
- \* We are a multicultural and diverse organization...
- \* We are an efficient and productive organization that excels in achieving its mission..."

The Guiding Principles are:

- \* We use an ecological approach to the multiple-use management of the National Forests and Grasslands.
- \* We use the best scientific knowledge in making decisions and select the most appropriate technologies in the management of resources.
- \* We are good neighbors who respect private property rights.
- \* We strive for quality and excellence in everything we do and are sensitive to the effects of our decisions on people and resources.
- \* We strive to meet the needs of our customers in fair, friendly, and open ways.
- \* We form partnerships to achieve shared goals.
- \* We promote grass-roots participation in our decisions and activities.
- \* We value and trust one another and share leadership.
- \* We value a multicultural organization as essential to our success.
- \* We maintain high professional and ethical standards.
- \* We are responsible and accountable for what we do.
- \* We recognize and accept that some conflict is natural and we strive to deal with it professionally.
- \* We follow laws, regulations, executive direction, and congressional intent.

## REGION 9: Project SPIRIT

In 1985, the Forest Service began implementing an experiment on four units: the Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri (R-9); the Ochoco National Forest in Oregon (R-6); the Gallatin National Forest in Montana (R-1); and the Pacific Southwest Research Station in California (R-5). The pilot programs operated under these guidelines:

1. No special treatment for pilot units.
2. Personnel ceilings are eliminated.
3. Line item budgets are no longer required.
4. Money saved could be applied to other priorities.
5. Give the pilot units maximum flexibility to operate within legal limits.

By 1987, productivity had increased by 10 to 35% on the four pilot units. Encouraged by the success of the Mark Twain National Forest, Region 9 volunteered to become the first pilot region. The Region 9 program is called Project SPIRIT which stands for Success, Productivity, Innovation, Risk, Intrapreneurship, and Trust. The objectives were to increase productivity, decrease spending, and improve the quality of work life.

Region 9, working with the same flexibility granted to the first four pilot programs, set about eliminating outdated rules, streamlining processes, flattening the organization, and empowering employees.

The Regional Office converted from eleven separate functional hierarchies to five integrated teams: human resources, public relations, natural resources, information resources, and capital resources. Leadership became shared between three Regional Foresters. The result was a reduced budget (the smallest in the Forest Service), reduced operating costs, and reduced personnel (through the attrition). Decision authorities and financial savings were delegated to the Forests and Districts.

Region 9 has their own management Philosophy, strategic Vision, and Role. (The following information is from Fulfilling Our Vision, Framework for Operations - FY 94 - Eastern Region.)

### Region 9 - Our Philosophy:

"The FS Management Charter describes the principles of management that guide our transition to a Regional work culture built on customer service, quality results, and empowerment of people."

### Region 9 - Our Vision:

- \* "The Regional Strategic Plan describes the organization the Region wants to become consistent with the FS Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles and Our Philosophy."
- \* "The Eastern Region: Positioning for the Future statement further amplifies this vision by outlining our ecological approach to natural resources management."
- \* The Attributes of an Organization with an Outstanding Human Resources Program brochure further amplifies this vision in respect to human resources management."

### Region 9 - Our Role:

"The RO Organization and Operations strategic issue paper defines the RO's primary role of Regional Leadership and Program Leadership, consistent with Our Philosophy and Our Vision."

The primary role of the Regional Office in Region 9 is: "...to provide oversight of the Eastern Region Forests that assures accountability to Chief's Office direction and the mandates of the Administration and Congress..."



Under Vision, Region 9 has six Management Goals and under each Management Goal are Strategic Issues. These six Management Goals are:

- \* Improving our management (4 strategic issues);
- \* Developing human resources (1 strategic issue);
- \* Nurturing our public relationships (5 strategic issues);
- \* Managing natural resources (5 strategic issues);
- \* Managing information resources (1 strategic issue); and
- \* Managing capital resources". (0 strategic issues)

Under the Management Goal of Improving our Management is the Strategic Issue of Customer Service. The Issue Statement is:

"There is a need for all Eastern Region people to see their jobs as customer service jobs, whether they're meeting the needs of customers internal to the organization or providing front-line customer service."

The Desired Future Condition for the Strategic Issue of Customer Service is:

- \* "Each Eastern Region person shares responsibilities for serving people.
- \* Human and dollar resources are available and focused to achieve customer satisfaction.
- \* Customers are an integral part of the management of Eastern Region National Forests.
- \* Customers are recognized for their contributions to improve our services.
- \* Facilities and services are equally accessible to all customers.
- \* Customer feedback serves as the foundation for changes in delivery of services."

Other innovations under Project SPIRIT include the Eastern Region University, flextime, and a full time Creative Consultant. To date, over 12,000 suggestions have been received with over 75% implemented.

The Eastern Region University (ERU) has been held annually since 1992. It began with six integrated colleges representing the six management goals in the region's vision. \$500,000 in training costs were saved the first year by offering courses once at a central location, instead of at various times and locations throughout the year. This system has the additional advantage of providing the opportunity to network with employees throughout the region. New for 1995, is a focused curriculum. These are integrated packages of courses (approximately 40 hours per package). Completion of the package earns a Certificate in that field. Included in the offerings will be a Certificate on providing quality customer service.

Oversight management reviews have been replaced by Changing Culture Visits. Some combination of Regional Foresters, Regional Office staff and employees, Forest Supervisors, and Forest and District employees visit every Forest, District, Job Corps, and Nursery in the Region. Their role is to listen and share changing culture experiences and to advance the Forest Service management philosophy, in an unstructured, interactive mode.

Although the pilot program has been highly successful in many ways, some problems have been encountered. The number one barrier is fear. Some people fear change; some fear loss of control or power; some fear accepting risk and responsibility. If the employees who resist change are managers, it can be especially difficult to get support for new ways of doing business. Concerns about control were responsible for the change from the "big bucket" budget back to a more traditional constrained budgeting system. Congress was uncomfortable over what they perceived to be a lack of accountability for allocated funding. In addition, during times of change such as downsizing and reorganizations, employees feel less secure and are less likely to take risks. Risk taking and occasional failures are necessary partners to innovation.

ARCHITECTURE FOR CHANGE: Interim Report of the Forest Service Reinvention Team  
(6/15/94) **Executive Summary**

Efforts to "reinvent" the Federal Government and its Agencies began with the National Performance Review, initiated in March 1993. Specific directions were provided in the Vice President's Report of the National Performance Review in September 1993. That Report directed Federal Agencies to put customers first, cut red tape, be empowered, and get back to basics.

To help create a Forest Service that is a world conservation leader, is fully engaged with its publics, and is an employer of choice, the Forest Service, in partnership with the USDA Office of Natural Resources and the Environment chartered a Forest Service Reinvention Team. The Team has focused on four objectives:

- (1) Describe the Forest Service of the future
- (2) Articulate the strategies that will create that new Forest Service
- (3) Position the Forest Service as a reinvention laboratory
- (4) Ensure implementation of executive orders and other actions that support the National Performance Review

It was clear at the outset that reinvention would require in-depth study of the design and structure of public administration. It also was necessary to seek the views of everyone who has a stake in the Forest Service and its activities. To gather the needed information, the Team has:

- o Held seminars
- o Hosted town hall meetings
- o Established a discussion network
- o Commissioned a national public opinion poll
- o Provided briefings, made presentations, and interacted with individuals and groups to gather information.

Nearly 3,000 individuals and groups have provided ideas and information. Here is a summary of six of the most important and often-mentioned ideas:

- (1) **Ecosystem management** should meet the needs of people and maintain the health, diversity, and sustainability of ecosystems.
- (2) **Forest Service decisions** should reflect public views and values, especially those of stakeholders. Current decision making is overly bureaucratic and time consuming, and does not result in acceptable decisions. The appeal process is similarly flawed. Management decisions should be based on science, but they also should accommodate human needs and values.
- (3) **High-quality customer service** and strong collaborative relationships with local stakeholders are essential.



- (4) **Communication and education** programs should more effectively address the needs of diverse publics with widely varying levels of interest in and understanding of natural resources.
- (5) **Our budget process** should provide resources to the places where work is accomplished and customers are served. User fees should be based on fair-market values of goods and services received. Fees that are collected should benefit the area where they are collected.
- (6) **Our organizational culture** should value all people. The current organization does not adequately seek and welcome diverse views and perspectives. Organizational barriers prevent full utilization of many of the talents available inside and outside the work force.

The Team has learned enough to describe a range of possibilities for a future Forest Service. This report describes the possibilities in what can be thought of as a tour of "model homes." The models are meant to display individual features, like various ways of cutting red tape, protecting ecosystems, and limiting bureaucracy. Each model is comprehensive, but few stakeholders will want to select all the features from a single model. Rather, models are designed to present the array of possibilities, reflect what has been heard and learned, and stimulate dialogue, debate, and consensus on what the Forest Service should be. The models are:

#### **Back to Basics**

This model goes forward by restoring--in a modern way--the things that made the Forest Service one of the most admired Federal Government Agencies. Primary purposes are to serve people and care for the land, and we try to manage in the spirit of "the greatest good to the greatest number in the long run." The Agency's basic structure is retained but shrunk through simplification and consolidation. Spans of supervisory control are widened. Emphasis shifts from production of commodities to supplying of amenities, but supplies of timber and forage are steady and sustainable.

#### **Continuous Adaptation**

This model recognizes constant change and adaptation as the most important need for the future. It therefore converts the Forest Service into a learning and evolving system. Ecosystem conditions, effects of treatments, and employee and stakeholder reactions and attitudes are monitored or surveyed. Effective decision-support systems--computing information systems and analysis processes to guide management actions--are created to respond appropriately to the monitoring and survey results.

#### **High-Value Ecosystem Integrity**

This model is designed to maintain ecosystem integrity while supplying most traditional forest benefits. The strategy is to emphasize production of high-value benefits. Aggressively restoring degraded ecosystems adds value to the National Forests and Grasslands, restores broad public support for the work of the Agency, and provides jobs both inside and outside the Agency. Sale prices for products and services increase because their values are greater and because open-market prices are charged.

#### **Global Conservation Stewardship**

This model describes stewardship on a global scale and addresses protection and management of National Forests in that context. The purpose of the Forest Service in the 21st Century is to further the philosophy, science, and practices of global conservation stewardship. National Forests and

Grasslands provide compelling examples of ecosystem management that influence sustainability of ecosystems and commerce. Agency organizational structure is nontraditional, and most services are provided by competing "enterprise teams" that must contract for enough work to survive.

#### **Convener and Facilitator**

In this model, the most important job of the Forest Service is to convene the individuals and groups that have interests of all kinds in ecosystems and facilitate decisionmaking. It is assumed that these "communities of interest," defined as broadly as possible, have the wisdom to decide what ecosystems need and the will to provide for those needs. Decisions are made collaboratively by the convened community of interest. Whenever possible, the Forest Service collaborates with others to get the work done rather than going it alone. The Forest Service perspective is "glocal"--we always keep global and local issues in mind. The Forest Service is an advocate for future generations and long-term sustainability when assembled stakeholders fail to represent those interests.

For each model, the Agency's purpose, outcomes, work, culture, and structure are described. In different ways and to different degrees, all the models:

- o Assure ecosystem integrity
- o Improve public involvement in Agency decisionmaking
- o Provide mechanisms for continuous improvement
- o Address the needs of communities that depend on National Forests and Grasslands
- o Improve efficiency and emphasize teamwork
- o Cut red tape and reduce bureaucracy
- o Deal with ecological complexity

In addition, all provide for a new labor-management partnership and envision a more efficient and responsive Forest Service that provides world-class customer service.



(d) benchmark customer service performance against the best in the business

Who are the best in the business?

Xerox, Motorola, Ritz Carlton, WalMart, Nordstroms, these are just a handful of the private companies recognized for providing outstanding customer service and for their business success.

In the public sector, several communities have experienced outstanding successes through implementing innovative ideas. Some examples are: Community School District #4 in East Harlem, New York; the budget system for the City of Visalia, California; administration of the Department of Defense under Bob Stone; and housing reform in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Unfortunately, many of these outstanding examples offer a service which is quite different from the mission of the Forest Service.

Are there any companies or agencies similar to the Forest Service which offer outstanding customer service?

In Recreation, Kampgrounds of America (KOAs) are known for their high standards. Research could identify other examples of quality recreation suppliers. For example, on each Forest, the employees and their customers are aware which businesses provide quality customer service.

One of our dilemmas in the Forest Service is the wide variety of customer needs that we attempt to satisfy. For example, our customers who want no vegetation management and no trails must be balanced with our customers who believe every acre of land should be open to timber harvests and mineral exploration. The ideal example for the Forest Service would be an organization that has successfully balanced such disparate needs. Is there one? Most organizations are more limited in their focus (for good reasons). Some possibilities might be federal, state, or local parks or forests or a large resort complex such as Disneyland.

Are there any examples of outstanding customer service in the USDA Forest Service?

Three examples are used in this paper: Region 4, Region 9, and the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. See inset page 27, ARTHUR CARHART NATIONAL WILDERNESS TRAINING CENTER: Charter and Program.

What are the general characteristics of successful companies?

Charles Garfield in his book, Second to None, identifies a paradigm (system of beliefs) shift in successful companies.

The old paradigm saw:

- 1-the organization as a finely tuned machine;
- 2-progress as unlimited economic growth;
- 3-the pyramid as the primary structure of the organization;
- 4-the rugged individualist as the hero of the business world. (Garfield, 1992, page 10)

The new paradigm sees:

1-the organization as an ecosystem (ibid, page 18)

2-progress as sustainable growth (ibid, page 22);

3-continuous incremental innovation as the primary structure of the organization (ibid, page 24)

4-fully participating partnerships with all employees. (ibid, page 46)

"...If we are to tap the full potential of employees - an essential requirement for competing in the 1990s - we must bring them together in teams. Ongoing innovation, the central task of the new story organization, requires constant communication, sharing of ideas, and coordination of activities, and these in turn demand close relationships among employees. Such close relationships...are cultivated in the context of teams,..." (ibid, page 164)

"The old story team was a microcosm of the machine-oriented organization...The new story team, by contrast, is an organic, living system characterized by partnership rather than power struggles...[It] functions as an autonomous entity, with an inherent group intelligence of its own; it is a 'smart' team." (ibid, page 170) There are three principles of the smart team: it is self managing; it is self-renewing; it is self-transcending (it learns).

Garfield identifies five elements in this transformation process:

- \* "Everyone within the organization shares the same core values."
- \* "The organization balances its legitimate needs for profit and growth with concern for the environment, for human welfare and fulfillment, and for the health and well-being of all its stakeholders."
- \* "The organization adopts a fluid, flexible structure that accommodates repaid change and generates continuous innovation."
- \* "A new thinking is evident within the organization, a mindset that eschews the 'one right way' of doing things, and that embraces paradox and reconciles opposites."
- \* "...the emergence of the fully participating partner." (ibid, pages 51-52)

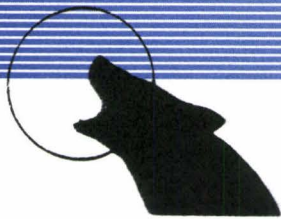
"An organization in which fully participating partners are the rule rather than the exception meets the following conditions:

- \* It provides a compelling mission and/or set of worthy values with which employees can identify.
- \* It provides a structure that encourages maximum participation by emphasizing flexibility and autonomy.
- \* It provides rewards for employee participation, and it does not punish employees for taking risks.
- \* It has ongoing involvement programs in place to ensure that full participation remains standard operating procedure.
- \* It recognizes and supports every employee's need to integrate work with family life." (ibid, page 95)

#### How does the Forest Service rate in comparison to successful companies?

If the new paradigm criteria identified by Garfield is used to evaluate the Forest Service, we still have a long way to go. For a discussion of barriers, see the next directive.





## ARTHUR CARHART NATIONAL WILDERNESS TRAINING CENTER

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### Charter and Program

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**Carhart Center Mission:** The Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center was established upon recommendation by Forest Service Regional Wilderness Directors and Specialists, representatives from the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, US Fish and Wildlife Service and Congressman Bruce Vento, MN. The mission of the Carhart Center is to: *Foster interagency excellence in wilderness stewardship by cultivating knowledgeable, skilled and capable wilderness managers and by improving public understanding of wilderness philosophy values and processes.*

**Philosophy:** The key to success of any program hinges on implementation. Implementation hinges on ownership and ownership on participation. The Carhart Center was not established to "do" wilderness management or training but to "steer" these efforts; to identify challenges in these areas and develop comprehensive, interagency solutions. Experts at all levels of each of the four agencies, along with outside experts, are called upon to design solutions using a team approach. By coordinating with wilderness leaders and managers from each agency, everyone benefits from the creative efforts of a few. Duplication of effort is reduced thus saving considerable time, energy and already limited funding.

**Product Distribution:** In an effort to reduce the cost of training, individuals are not expected to travel to the Carhart Center to attend courses. Rather, training materials are produced by the Center and distributed across the National Wilderness Preservation System. A complete set of publications will be sent one time directly to each unit of the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service having responsibility for wilderness management. Each unit will, in turn, be responsible for making appropriate use of these materials.

**Steering Committee:** Projects to be pursued by the Carhart Center are identified by an interagency *Steering Committee* which includes two representatives from each of the four agencies responsible for managing the National Wilderness Preservation System. The *Steering Committee* assigns tasks, determines priorities, measures performance and evaluates objectives for both the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center and the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute.

**Wilderness Working Group:** The *Wilderness Working Group* provides input to the *Steering Committee* and is made up of: one representative each from the BLM, NPS and USFWS; Forest Service Regional Wilderness Coordinators; one member from the Forest Service National Field Wilderness Advisory Group, the Director of the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute and the Director of the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. The *Wilderness Working Group* is chaired by the National Leader for Wilderness Management from the Washington Office of the Forest Service.

**Carhart Center Staff:** The Carhart Center is located just west of Missoula, Montana and includes a staff of three people: the Director, Training Development and Publication Coordinator, and Training Development Specialist. The Colorado State University Interagency Wilderness Correspondence Course and Leave No Trace Coordinator also reports to the Center Director. The Center Director in turn reports to the Forest Service National Leader for Wilderness Management at the Washington Office. To enhance efficiency, administrative support is provided by the Ninemile Ranger District and the Lolo National Forest Supervisors Office.

**Carhart Center Funding:** Funding for the Carhart Center is project driven and continued funding hinges on providing high quality service to wilderness managers. The Carhart Center is a results oriented, customer driven organization and funding is to be provided by each of the four agencies managing the Wilderness Preservation System. Total minimum annual operating expenses will be \$200,000. Should the cost of completing assigned tasks exceed \$200,000, additional funding would have to be approved by the *Steering Committee* and *Wilderness Working Group*.

(e) survey front-line employees on barriers to, and ideas for, matching the best in the business

"Some people are simply unable to make the break from the old story [paradigm] to the new... 'The guys we need in the future, the number one competence is people competence, not technical competence. Sure, you lost some technical competence, but you had some people who were incompetent when it came to really communicating, leading, and giving people an environment which they would find to be motivating. That's a big issue.'" (Garfield, 1992, page 38)

What barriers have been identified in the Forest Service?

Region 4 hired a consultant to survey all of their employees. Many of the barriers identified by Region 4 employees are probably found throughout the Forest Service. Ideally, all employees in every Region will be surveyed. The barriers identified by Region 4 employees are (from Service Quality Report, 11/92, Kaset International):

- \* There is an emphasis on targets at the expense of customer service. This also means employees receive a mixed message, since the [Region 4] Vision focuses on customer service.
- \* Employees feel uncertain about the future. During uncertain periods morale decreases; employees are reluctant to move; employees are afraid to make mistakes, which leads to decreased productivity; and employees quit if they can.
- \* Employees are not empowered enough to be flexible. They want to satisfy customer needs but cannot because of lack of empowerment.



- \* Employees are not organized to provide quality customer service. Quality customer service requires cooperation and teamwork. Employees need to be able to communicate freely in all directions.
- \* Customer feedback does not drive management decisions. Management decisions are not based on customer service. Most customers do not complain because they do not know how or they do not believe it will change anything. Customer feedback which is received is not communicated throughout the Region. There is no Region wide system for handling complaints.
- \* Employees are not trained to provide service excellence. New employee orientation is weak. Employees are not sufficiently trained in problem solving. Employees need training on how to effectively work in teams.
- \* Employees with service quality problems are not helped. Supervisors need training in coaching skills.
- \* Quality customer service skills do not lead to promotions. An obvious connection between performance and reward is needed. Employees need to be hired based on service skills.
- \* Many policies, practices, and procedures inhibit the delivery of service quality. "Red rules" are laws and must be followed. "Blue rules" are created for the convenience of that particular work unit. Many blue rules are interpreted as red rules, which restricts the employees ability to serve customers.
- \* There are few systems to prevent or recover from mistakes. No system means mistakes continue to occur, and there is no correction.
- \* Leadership does not communicate regularly with employees or customers. Sharing information is vital to ensure satisfied customers.

- \* Employees do not participate in making decisions that effect them. Employee participation "...ensures that decisions are based on accurate, timely information,..." and promotes ownership by employees. Lack of participation may leave employees resentful and frustrated, which may cause customer service to suffer and means employees talents are underutilized. (Kaset International, 11/92, page 15)
- \* Employees claim nothing will change as a result of this survey. The consultant interpreted this to mean that Region 4 employees are highly resistant to change.

What were the recommendations to address these barriers?

The consultants in Region 4 recommended the following to address the barriers identified by Region 4 employees (from Service Quality Report, 11/92, Kaset International):

- \* Keep employees informed about the future. Employees would then be more likely to accept or even promote change.
- \* Ensure quality service is the primary focus. "Studies indicate the most successful government organizations stress service quality as their primary objective rather than productivity." (ibid, page 19) This promotes public and political support; places the emphasis on people and their needs; increases morale, harmony, teamwork, and cooperation; and increases productivity.
- \* Empower employees to make important quality service decisions. This requires a flexible interpretation of standard policies, practices, and procedures.
- \* Stress the need for and plan for increased cooperation between employees and work units. In other words, reorganize if needed and provide training on teamwork.



- \* Measure customer satisfaction. Don't wait for them to complain; ask them what they think.
- \* Share customer feedback with all employees.
- \* Train all employees to provide quality customer service. This includes quality customer service skills, problem solving, and teamwork.
- \* Train all managers and supervisors to coach and motivate employees to provide quality service.
- \* Establish clear relationships between quality customer service and performance evaluations. Clarify that customer service is a basic work requirement, not an extra.
- \* Recognize and reward employees who demonstrate quality customer service.
- \* Recruit and hire employees based on their service skills or potential. Anyone can be trained in these skills, but those with an interest are easier to train.
- \* Institute a Regionwide system to manage and minimize mistakes. This process includes: admit the mistake; apologize; fix it; atone for it; and monitor to prevent future occurrences.
- \* Review and revise policies, practices, and procedures to make them more customer friendly.
- \* Establish proactive communication between management and employees and customers.
- \* Managers share information everywhere.
- \* Increase employee involvement in decisions that effect them.
- \* Actively implement these suggestions to show employees that things will change for the better.

What is the cause of employee cynicism on the prospects for positive change?

A remarkable book by Peter Block, Stewardship, addresses this issue.

"All of these ideas for cultural change are useful [total quality management, empowerment, etc.], but the need for a new fix every couple of years means our experience with them has no depth. They each give our organizations a new look, but the features and the mindset and living style stay the same. These efforts then are simply cosmetic." (Block, 1993, page 186)

In Stewardship, Peter Block has identified several major barriers to reform. (Changes to improve customer service require reforms within the organization.) His theory is that existing organizations are organized around a patriarchy (parent - child relationship). "Patriarchy uses a mixture of leadership, consistency, control, and predictability to try to implement the ideas of empowerment, partnership, and self-management." (ibid, page 185) Block proposes stewardship (adult - adult relationships or partnerships) instead. "Stewardship asks us to be deeply accountable for the outcomes of an institution, without acting to define purpose for others, control others, or take care of others." (ibid, page 18) "Hope for genuine organizational reform resides in reshaping the politics of our work lives, namely how we each define purpose, hold power, and balance wealth." (ibid, page 5)

Definitions for the terms constituting Patriarchy, according to Block, are:

Control: "Control means that there is a clear line of authority.

Decisions about policy, strategy, and implementation are the domain and prerogative of the leader. People at the middle and the bottom exist to execute and implement." (ibid, page 23)

Consistency: "Consistency means that we need a common way of managing ourselves across the organization." (ibid, page 24)

Predictability: "The belief is that things that cannot be measured cannot be controlled, and they are therefore unmanageable." This "...leads people to give more attention to the measurement than to the service or product or outcome." (ibid, page 24)

"On the surface, patriarchy may appear to be a common sense and logical approach to governance...From another angle, though it is possible to see how patriarchy's demands for control, consistency, and predictability become its own obstacle." (ibid, page 25) "The unwitting outcome of our belief in control, consistency, and predictability is that ownership and responsibility for solving the challenges of cost, customer satisfaction, and employer commitment are localized primarily at the top of the organization." "... If you need ownership and responsibility from core workers, patriarchy cannot get you there. It steals accountability from the middle and the bottom of the organization." (ibid, page 25)

"The principles of stewardship bring accountability into each act of governance, while partnership balances responsibility." (ibid, page 27)

Stewardship provides the following benefits to businesses:

- \* How to do more with less? "...fundamentally it comes from individual choice. One person deciding how much ownership and responsibility to take for the quality of product, quality of service, quality of contact with a customer." (ibid, page 20)
- \* How to adapt to customers and the marketplace? "Can a belief system that demands control, consistency, and predictability [patriarchy] deliver short cycle time and highly adaptive responses to clients who have greater and greater choices over where to go to get their needs met?" (ibid, page 21)
- \* How to create passion and commitment in employees? "...we need employees who have chosen to take ownership and responsibility for the success of the organization." (ibid, page 21)

"The questions 'How would partners handle this?' and 'What policy or structure would we create if this were a partnership?' are the two most useful questions I know in the search for the alternative to patriarchy." (ibid, page 27)

Block identifies four requirements for partnerships:

- \* exchange of purpose: "Patriarchy has those at the top define purpose for the organization." "Partnership means each of us at every level is responsible for defining vision and values." (ibid, page 29)
- \* the right to say no: "Partnership does not mean you always get what you want. It means you may lose your argument, but you never lose your voice." (ibid, page 30)
- \* joint accountability: "Each person is responsible for outcomes. There is no one else to blame. ...if people want the freedom that partnership offers, the price of that freedom is to take personal accountability for the success and failure of our unit and our community." (ibid, page 30)



\* absolute honesty: "Patriarchy creates a parent - child relationship between bosses and subordinates, and parents and children don't expect to tell the truth to each other. In a partnership, not telling the truth to each other is an act of betrayal. One of the benefits of redistributing power is that people feel less vulnerable and are more honest." (ibid, page 31)

"A major obstacle to reform is our tendency to externalize the problem." (ibid, page 38) "One way we avoid dealing with our own doubts is by focusing on the doubts of others. ... Conversations about empowerment always seem to turn to a discussion of how we are going to change other people. ... There is little we can do about the integrity of other people's actions." (ibid, page 39) "For example, we generally agree that we want to eliminate bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is patriarchy in the extreme, with people being overly cautious, choosing safety over risk, being more interested in self than in service, exercising control for its own sake. No amount of effort to change these qualities around us will be effective until we have confronted these qualities in ourselves." (ibid, page 40)

"Stewardship depends on a willingness to be accountable for results without using control or caretaking as the means to reach them. This demands a choice for service with partnership and empowerment as basic governance strategies." (ibid, page 49)

Frequently training is suggested as a solution to the problem of poor customer service. "We know that change is a learning process, so what could make more sense than training?" "The problem is their mandatory nature... Real responsibility for outcomes, direction, and recreating culture stays centralized." "If we want people serving customers and making product[s] to take ownership and responsibility, they will have to define and create the means for successful[ly] living out those responsibilities on their own." (ibid, pages 197-198)

Performance appraisals are revised to reflect changing values. "The ingrained belief is that if we want to move in new directions, we have to amend the performance appraisal process to reflect the dimensions of change." (ibid, page 198) "Appraisal is a process of coercion." "There is not a customer in the world who would submit to a performance appraisal by a supplier." "If we want to create a credible system of appraisal and accountability in a partnership environment, then each person needs a voice in deciding what they will be judged on and by whom." (ibid, page 198)

Change is frequently mandated from the top down, to begin now. "If our intent is to build an institution based on partnership and service, each unit needs to be in charge of its own transition." "Creating the demand or the expectation that we will all move together, along a common path, drives doubt and resistance underground." "Doubt, caution, and reservation need to be honored for a change process to have real effect." "Talking about across-the-board change does not make it so." (ibid, pages 199-200)

(f) provide customers with choices in both the sources of service and the means of delivery

What are sources of service and means of delivery?

Sources of service are where the information or service you provide can be received. Some examples of source locations in the Forest Service are: administrative offices, visitors centers, trails, and campgrounds.

The means of delivery today include: in person, by telephone, by mail, by fax, and by computer.

What choices does the Forest Service offer?

The Forest Service offers a range of choices in service and means of delivery.

Within the agency, customers may choose between Forests, and within the Forest, between local offices. Some Forest have set up additional small offices in locations which may better serve the public than their administrative office. Some administrative offices have been relocated or combined to save money. Are impacts to customers considered in these moves?

Within an office, customers may access information in person, via telephone (including text telephones), via mail, by computer, or by fax. At this time our computer access is expanding, but not yet available to the public, except through some universities. Some offices have acquired automated phone systems. Careful consideration as to whether these systems improve customer service needs to be made. Automated phone systems, for example, may replace personal contacts with machines, and those without touch tone phones may be unable to reach even a machine.



Within each Forest, a spectrum of opportunities should be available, from primitive to highly developed.

Elaborate systems have been developed to ensure the public is afforded the opportunity to participate in decisions made about the Forest, such as the new appeal process. A 30 day public comment period is required before the final decision is made on the best way (or whether to) implement a project which falls under the National Environmental Protection Act.

**(g) make information, services, and complaint systems easily accessible**

Under (f) choices in service and means of delivery were discussed. Under this section (g), access to those choices and access to information about those choices are discussed. The customer must be aware of the choices available to them before they can choose. There are a number of ways to increase access to information, services, and complaint systems.

What are the physical access needs?

The source of the information should be conveniently located, both in distance traveled and in ease of finding it. The hours and days open should match the needs of the customer. Once there, the customer should be able to receive the information or service they need or want. If dissatisfied, they should be encouraged to say so and why, what they want done about it, and have it taken care of in a timely manner.

In compliance with recent laws, all public agencies must provide equal service to persons with mobility, sight, hearing, and mental disabilities. Some considerations are: If a customer uses a wheelchair, can they get in the front door? If a customer cannot read tiny print, do we have large print brochures available? If a customer cannot hear, do we have sign language interpreters available for our campfire program?

What are the psychological access needs?

"Quality is that which meets the customer's expectations.", according to John Guaspari in his book, The Customer Connection. (Guaspari, 1988, page 53) According to Guaspari, "...the reality is that customer expectations exist whether you decide to do anything about them or not." (ibid, page 68)

- \* "Quality must be viewed from the customers' perspective.
- \* Customers are looking for answers to needs.
- \* Customers seek out those answers by engaging in transactions.
- \* Therefore, it's the quality of the transaction - a superset of product quality or service quality - that should get the attention." (ibid, page 83)
- \* "Quality is that which meets the customer's expectations.
- \* Quality is a starting point not an ending point, with a focus on the presence of value and not the absence of defects." "...customers gravitate toward the supplier who exceeds their expectations." (ibid, page 148)



(h) provide means to address customer complaints

"The point is that in spite of - in fact, probably because of - a wholly sincere and admirable effort to improve and ensure the quality of service provided, [the airline] had managed to convince itself that there was no problem. Or rather, to the extent that a problem existed at all, it was simply that the customer 'just didn't understand'." (Guaspari, page 27)

The Forest Service has no formal system to respond to complaints, unless they are part of a process mandated by legislation, such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, the American's with Disabilities Act, etc. These processes have traditionally been very formal, with little avenue for negotiations and resolution at the beginning. A formal process always has the implication of finding who is to blame and pointing fingers, when frequently, the customer just wants someone to listen, acknowledge, and resolve their problem.

Our existing complaint system is usually to listen (or not listen) when people complain, frequently to feel unable to correct the problem (even though you know how) for fear of violating some regulation and landing in jail. The customer may then contact our supervisor and our supervisor's supervisor, and finally write their Congress person. Congress then gives us the funding and targets (and sometimes rewrite the laws and policies) so we can meet that customer's needs, which we then do.

In some ways, this means that Congress is our customer. Congress allocates our funding and sets our targets. If we please Congress we get more money, if not, our staff and budgets are reduced. (This is not a simple process, of course, and the public is involved both in helping Congress make decisions on what to allocate and in helping the Forest Service make decisions on what to request.) This is not an excuse for poor customer service, but is another barrier that needs to be addressed or at least acknowledged.

In Recreation, some Forests have comment cards available at administrative offices and developed recreation sites. These are informal written opportunities to provide input. Input by phone and mail occurs on a regular basis. What happens with this input, though? Providing regular easy and convenient opportunities for input and some measure of accountability is important. Let each Forest develop their own system.

Frequently we believe accountability must be taken literally, that is, by counting. It would be nice to know how many complaints per month are received, how many were resolved, and how quickly were they resolved. The problem comes when we spend our time counting instead of preventing or resolving complaints.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

What can we do immediately to improve customer service quality?

- \* Start by recognizing that customer service is part of our job.
- \* Emphasize the benefits of customer service.
- \* Ask our customers what they want.
- \* Listen to what they say.
- \* Give them what they want, if we can.
- \* Refer them to where they can get what they want, if we cannot meet their needs.
- \* Apply these same principles to our employees.

There are many means to implement these recommendations. Some possibilities are: set an example by your personal behavior; give training to all employees on how to provide quality customer service; recognize and reward quality customer service; make changes based on what your customers tell you; explain the reasons for our decision, if we cannot accommodate them; treat your fellow employees as you the customer would like to be treated, that is, with respect and courtesy.



Karl Mettke in Creativity Fringes, May 1994, has this advice for our leaders:

"If you want involvement and commitment, people need to be involved in the formulation stage, not at the end when most decisions are already made. Leaders find it difficult to relinquish some of these responsibilities fearing a loss of control. This is probably one of the biggest changes faced by our leaders and that's sharing power and leadership. It's easy to endorse new ideas as long as others have to implement them. The 'new' leader begins by seeking out feedback soliciting ideas from all levels of the organization. The 'new' leaders listen and understand the feedback provided by their peers, subordinates and customers. The 'new' leader takes responsibility for implementing change and doesn't delegate it to someone else to do. The 'new' leader assumes employees can find solutions to problems."

What long term changes are needed to improve customer service quality?

In the federal government, the organizational structure of the bureaucracy is a barrier to the employees and in turn, a barrier to the customer in receiving quality customer service. Changing an organization in depth is a long term process which occurs slowly.

Peter Block in Stewardship, has identified a process for this change. "Our redesign begins with customer requirements, which is the essence of the service orientation of stewardship." (Block, 1993, page 216) This process has employees assume personal responsibility for their job, by providing a flexible workplace which allows for experimentation.

- \* Step 1: Define the stewardship contract. Establish your mission and identify the benefits that motivate the effort towards change. The benefits are for the employees and the customers.

The USDA Forest Service has already clearly identified their mission. The next step is to identify the benefits of quality customer service. To determine these, ask your employees and your customers!

- \* Step 2: Renegotiate control and responsibility. Outcomes, not process, are agreed upon as goals.

In the Forest Service, this could mean changing the form of our targets. For example, instead of a target of a certain number of wildlife openings to occur by prescribed burn, the target could be to provide a range of habitats (ecosystems) so that a variety of wildlife can flourish. Let local teams determine how to accomplish this within their time, personnel, and funding constraints. Provide support to the team with employees who can discover how we can get things done, not why we cannot.

- \* Step 3: Fully inform people about the budget, about customer's needs, about proposed changes and uncertainty. "The point is to help people understand the consequences of their choices." (ibid, page 215)

For example, in the Forest Service, instead of eliminating a project because the funding was not received, let employees know the full picture. Many times there are other ways that the same objectives can be implemented. Don't keep the budget a secret!

- \* Step 4: Create a desired future.

The Forest Plan identifies the desired future condition for the Forest. This may need to be revised, based on changing direction.

- \* Step 5: Training. Send teams together for the training they have chosen to best meet the needs they have identified. If customer service is a priority, employees will select this training as a need.
  
- \* Step 6: Form improvement teams. "Many improvement teams cross functions and levels. Their focus is usually on cost cutting, quality enhancement, reducing cycle time, and satisfying customers." (ibid, page 216) Implement recommendations received!
  
- \* Step 7: Change management practices. "As we get clear what is valued by our customers, we address how to create procedures that make it easy for core workers to take ownership and responsibility for meeting those requirements." (ibid, page 216)

For both Steps 6 and 7, flexibility in the workplace is critical. Many times employees know how to solve problems, but are not trusted or granted the authority to do so. Delegate authorities. Support reasonable variations in policy.

- \* Step 8: Fit architecture to purpose. "This step is about redesigning the structure or architecture of the organization. It usually involves structuring multifunctional units around a customer or a product." (ibid, page 217)

Many Forests have reorganized. Now we need to work on organizing the chaos to take advantage of the new systems. Allow time to develop new relationships. Set examples and reward quality communication.



\* Step 9: Redesign the reward system. "Changing the compensation system has to be done, but only after the other changes have begun to take hold. When we ask people to act as owners, we need to pay them more as owners. The pay system needs to be related to outcomes..." "Changing the pay system will not get us the end results we are looking for, but it needs doing for the sake of equity and to maintain credibility in the changes we are requesting." (ibid, page 217)

For the Forest Service, this could mean paying our clerks and technicians on a scale equal to our professionals.

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